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THE STORY OF SOME SICK LAND

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T H I S I S T H E S T O R Y

CHAPTER I --- ESCALANTE IS A TYPICAL AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY IN SOUTHERN UTAH, DEVOTED TO STOCKRAISING.

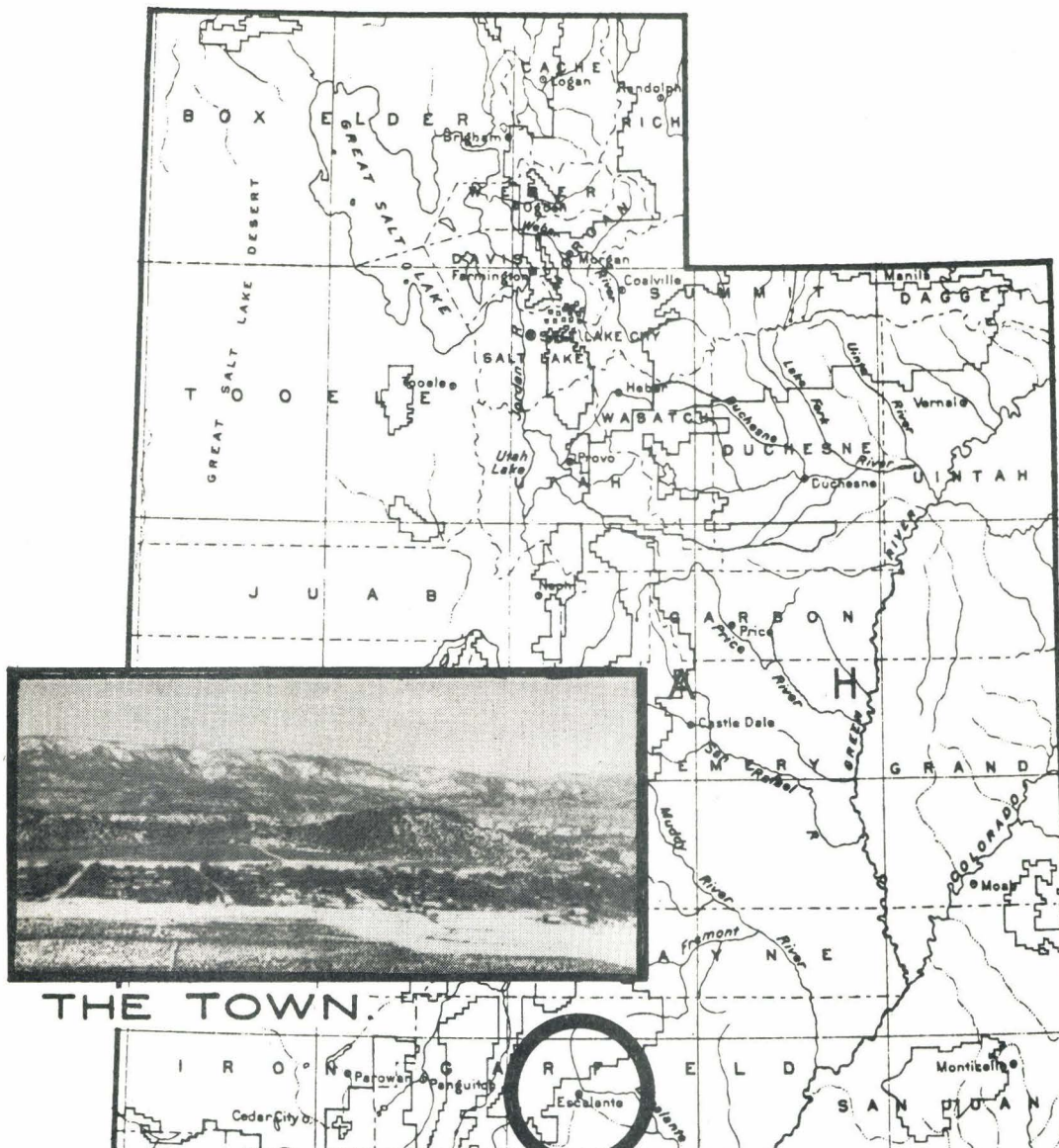
CHAPTER II -- REAPING THE HARVEST OF LAND ABUSE.

CHAPTER III - WE HAVE A JOB TO DO.

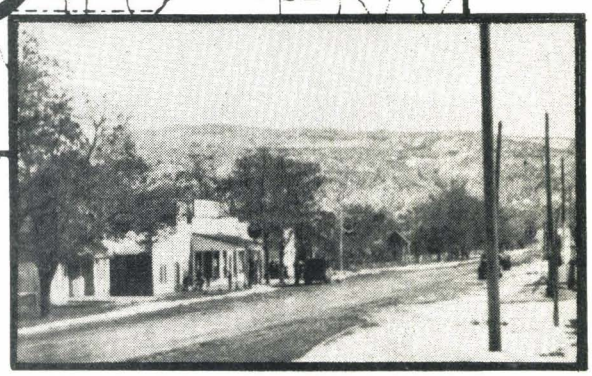
CHAPTER IV -- CAN THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IGNORE THIS?

CHAPTER V --- NATIONAL PROGRESS CAN BE MEASURED IN STABLE COMMUNITIES.

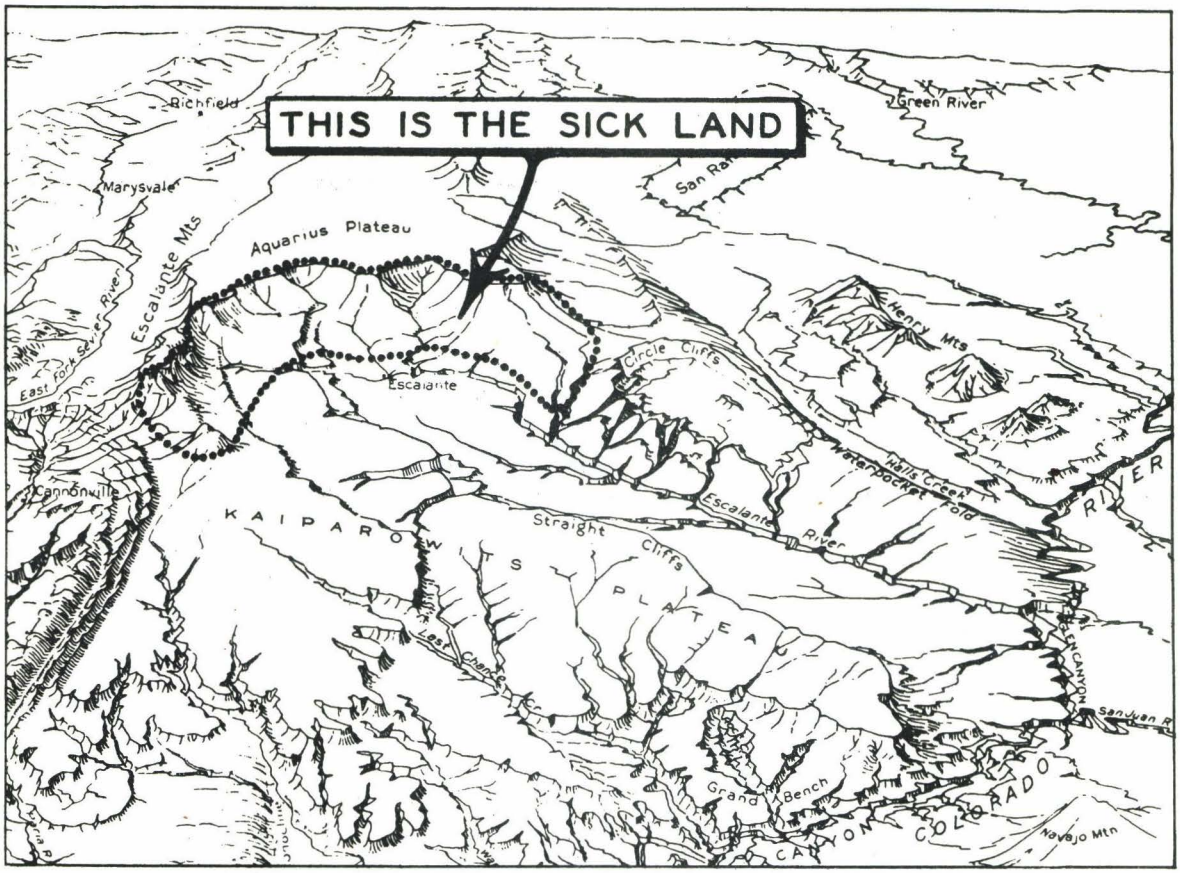
HERE IS ESCALANTE, UTAH.



THE TOWN.



MAIN STREET.



GENERALIZED VIEW OF THE KAIPAROWITS REGION LOOKING NORTH

HERE WE HAVE A COUNTRY OF

- Unevenly distributed rainfall
- Sudden hard showers
- Rapid runoff
- Highly erosive soil
- Scanty vegetation

THE STORY IN BRIEF

"Excessive degradation began during the decade of 1880-1890. This may reasonably be ascribed to climate assisted by human agencies."

-From Geological Survey Professional Paper No. 164
by Herbert E. Gregory and Raymond C. Moore, 1931.

These three hundred thousand acres of mountainous land on the Powell National Forest (pointed out on the preceding page in a sketch adapted from the above-quoted publication) would not make a good-sized speck on a map of the United States. But large or small, sick or productive, these acres embody the destiny of Escalante village.

Why? . . . . . That's the story!

Water from these mountains gives Escalante life. They are "humid islands". The production of beef and mutton supports that life, and the key link to profitable stockraising is summer forage grown on the high mountains. The annual crop of forage feeds the annual crop of beef and mutton animals through the summer season and they are sold in the fall. During the winter grazing season the breeding animals forage the desert below.

This is the nature of the "living resources". The people of Escalante can make their contribution to national wealth only through the growing of livestock. That is the only way the annual forage crop can be harvested. Neither livestock production nor the community of Escalante could long survive without the use of the summer range.

But--the summer range lands are sick. Accelerated erosion is rampant. The range cover is deteriorated. Livestock production has sunk to an all-time low and further shrinkage seems inevitable. Flood waters are ripping out reservoirs, tearing at farms, and filling irrigation ditches with silt.

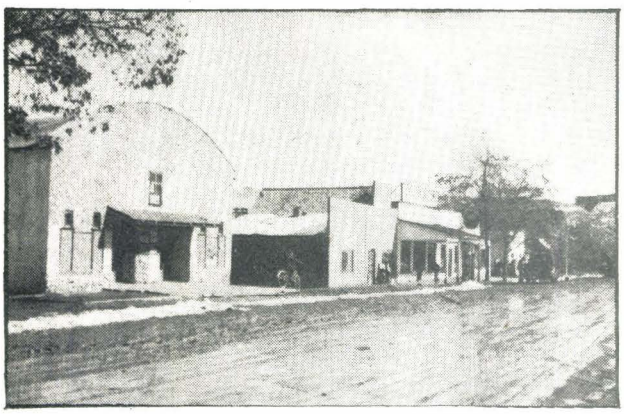
This man-made movement of soil can be arrested. Economic loss can be stopped. The tempo of the corrective action at the source must be greatly increased with intensified control of erosion and improvement of range cover on national forest land.

The people of Escalante realize their plight. They have organized to improve their own lands bordering the national forest. They are offering to cooperate in the improvement of the national forest. Here is a challenge to the Federal Government to place its own lands in productive condition and to help these people achieve economic stability.

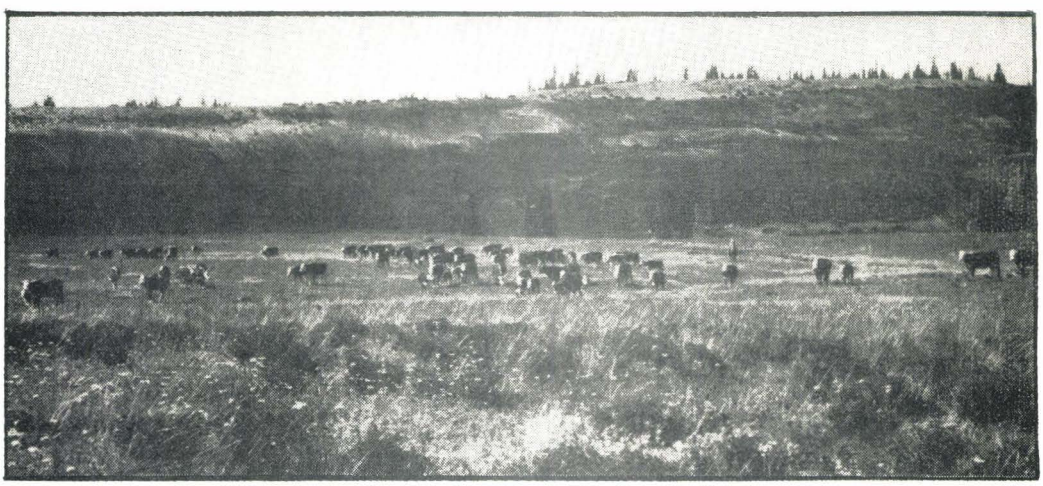
THIS IS THE STORY

Chapter I

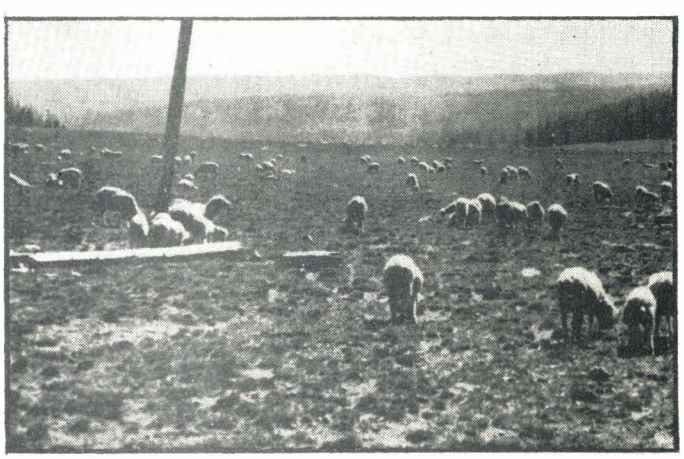
ESCALANTE IS A TYPICAL AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY OF SOUTHERN UTAH, DEVOTED TO STOCKRAISING.



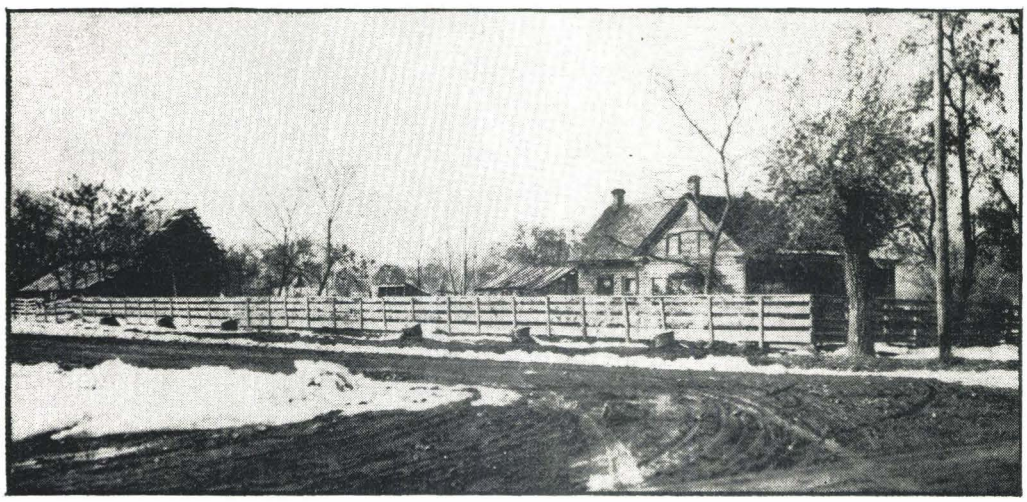
This particular town was settled in 1875 by Mormon pioneers in search of new pastures for their sheep and cattle.



They found the pastures, liked the country, and stayed.



Five years later 623 people had moved in to establish their homes.



They are still building. They are tenacious people.

To bring the story up to date:

JUST BEFORE THE WAR	and	NOW
1200 people		900 people
250 family units		209 family units
200 W.P.A. workers		115 in military service
		185 war workers
57 families on relief		Everyone who can work is working.

These people like their country. Through the 70 years that Escalante has existed they have become firmly rooted to their lands and watersheds.

Escalante stockmen.

Escalante Mountain looking toward the desert.

The raising of sheep and cattle is their heritage and the way of life for which they are sending men and women out to fight and to which those sent want to return. It is right that they should continue in their chosen mode of living, but they cannot do so for long on sick land - any more than the dust-bowl people could stay on theirs.

Chapter II

REAPING THE HARVEST OF LAND ABUSE

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It is all too plain that mistakes were made from the start. Pastures for livestock seemed unlimited and more and more livestock were brought into Escalante. Some of the older residents say there were 20,000 cattle and more than 60,000 sheep in early times.

* * * * *

The watersheds were naturally erosive, and it took only a few years of this unlimited use to start the "excessive degradation" that Dr. Gregory tells us began during the decade of 1880-1890. That was just five years after the community was settled.

* * * * *

Early damage by overgrazing is exacting its full toll. It is a well-known story. Poor forage plants replace good ones; insufficient feed follows abundant feed. Depleted plant cover cannot hold its supporting soil, and - water and wind do the rest.

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Only one-quarter of the cattle and sheep that were pastured on the watershed sixty years ago can find pasture there now.

* * * * *

It all adds up to this - Escalante has grown from a community of 600 to one of 1200 population in sixty years. In the same period their herds have been reduced to one-fourth the original size.

* * * * *

If you told a business man to double his number of employees and to cut down his business to one-quarter of its volume you would be told in plain, clear, precise language that you were "nuts". Yet that is exactly what has happened at Escalante.

Chapter III

WE HAVE A JOB TO DO

Exploitation of this land has, through the years, provided the men, women, and children of Escalante with the "staff of life". If they had known years ago, what they know now, about the effects of grazing too heavily and too long they might have stocked their ranges according to what could safely be carried - or, they might not have. Early Americans weren't thinking in terms of soil. They accepted it in their matter-of-fact way and used it - plenty.

This booklet is not to condemn. It is not to say I told you so. It is to put forth a challenge to Americans to learn to think in terms of soil. Then countless watersheds can be rebuilt before it is too late. It is not too late at Escalante - not if we start now.

* * * * *

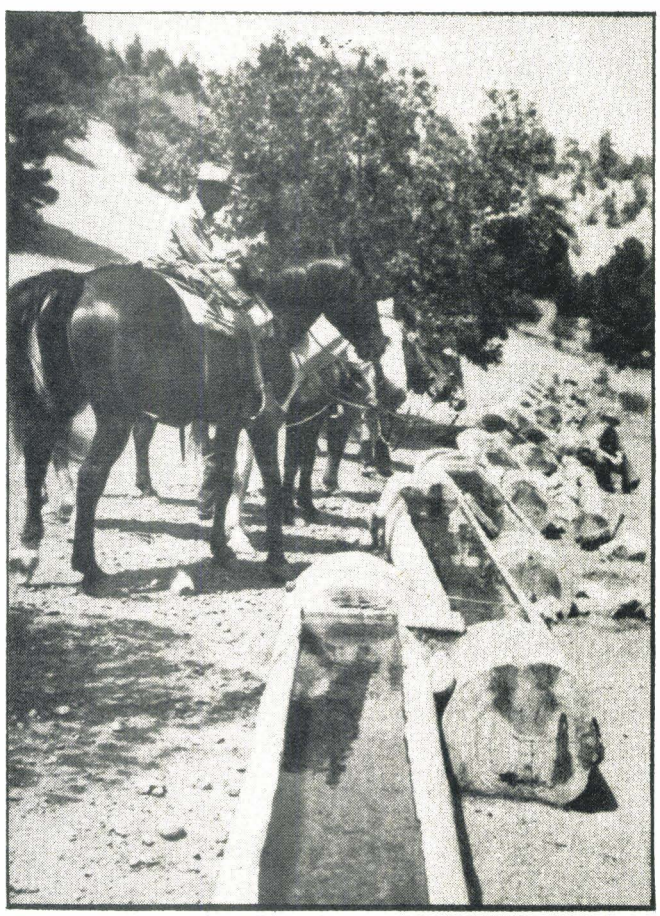
Devices are perfected, for just the kind of work that needs to be done on sick lands, and they are adaptable to Escalante watersheds:

Contour trenches and channel structures will hold back the rushing water and give it a chance to soak into the ground, thus favoring the reestablishment of plant cover.

Contour trenches are the first step. They will be planted to grass.

Native material makes good dams.

Range fences will protect forage from too much grazing.



More troughs for sheep and cattle will make short trips to water. Plants and soil do not stay on stock trails.

Planting many denuded acres to palatable grasses will make more feed to save feed.

Reseeded areas provide a sponge for rain water. They will restrain excessive runoff.

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All these things can be done, but results will take time. We have waited too long and done too little to expect miracles to happen overnight.

* * * * *

Future progress calls for PLANS and for ACTION.

THE PLANS are made.

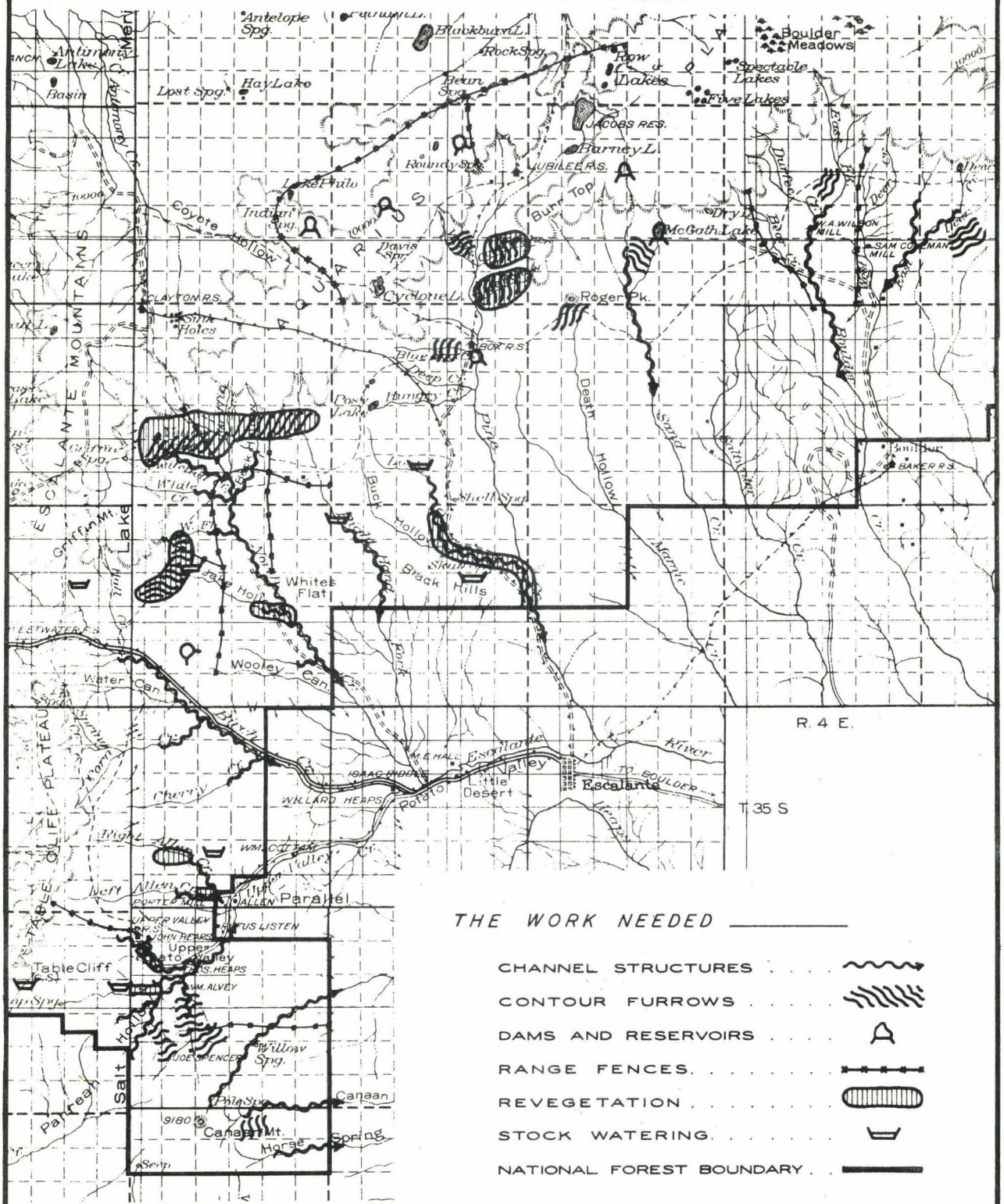
THE ACTION depends on the value the United States places on this small community's continued existence.

THE PLANS ARE MADE !

THESE ARE THE LOCATIONS OF THE NEW PROJECTS, ON THE

ESCALANTE RANGER DISTRICT

POWELL NATIONAL FOREST



THE WORK NEEDED

- CHANNEL STRUCTURES
- CONTOUR FURROWS
- DAMS AND RESERVOIRS
- RANGE FENCES
- REVEGETATION
- STOCK WATERING
- NATIONAL FOREST BOUNDARY

Chapter IV

CAN THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IGNORE THIS?

Twelve hundred people aren't very many out of 130 million, but a good share of that 130 million is made up of thousands of similar communities. Many of those in our semi-arid west are facing the same problem that Escalante is facing - repair now or go into a fade-out.

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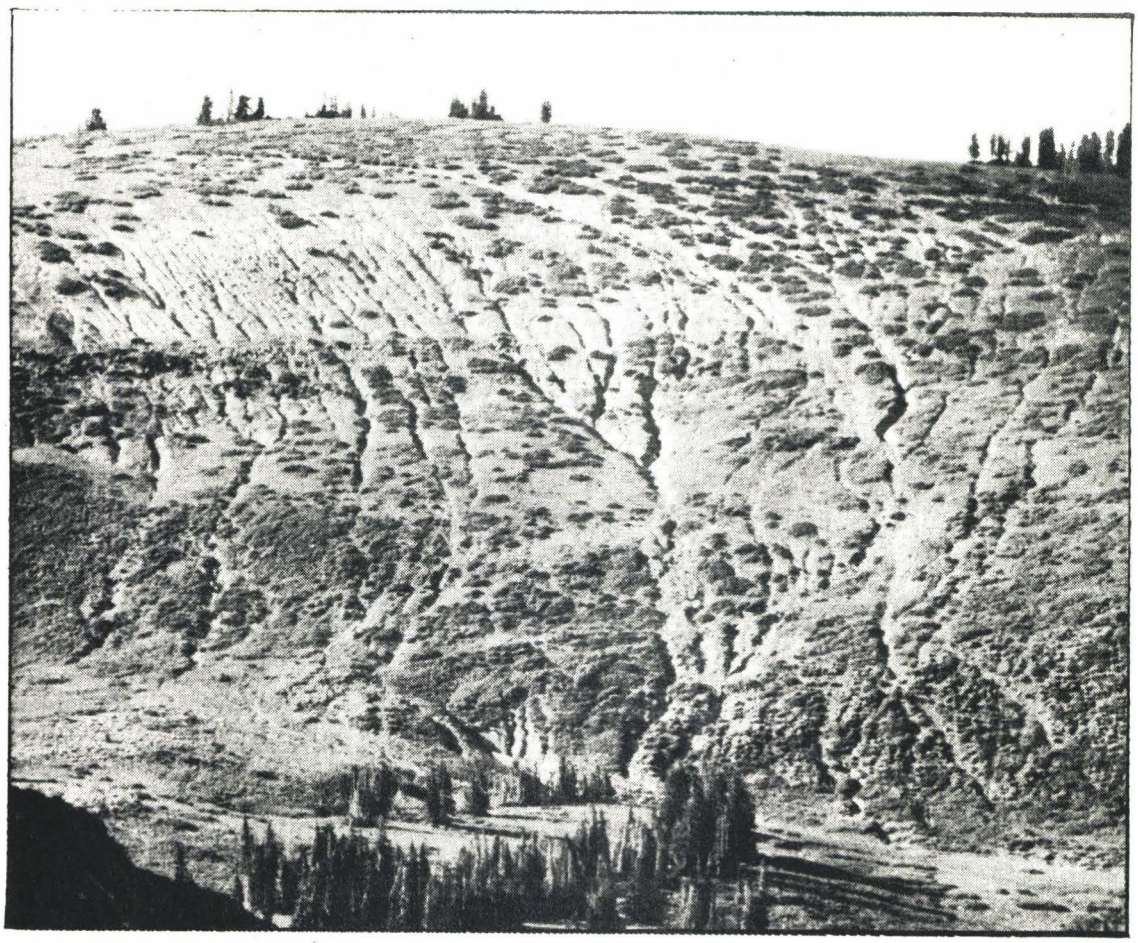
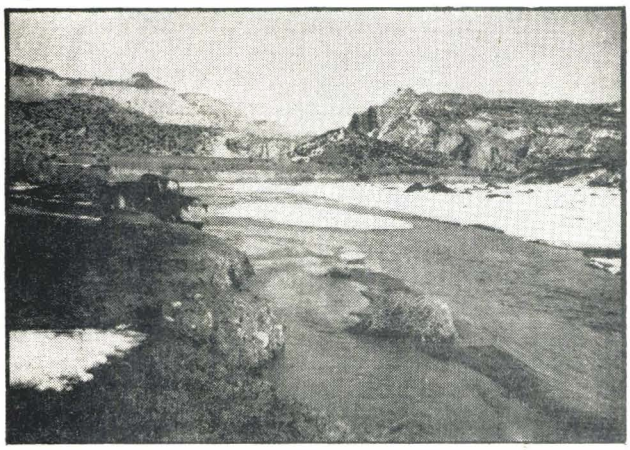
Land like this is expensive - a liability. It can be made into an asset by spending a fraction of what it will cost 25 years from now.



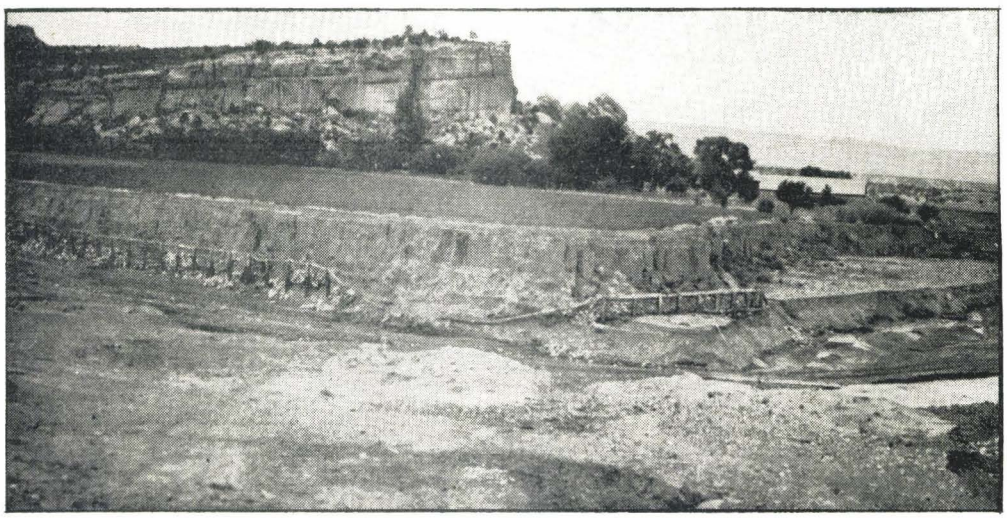
This is happening on more than half of the Escalante watershed.

Streams like the Escalante river, heavily laden with silt, gather impetus on eroded watersheds.



Uncontrolled in floods it bites great chunks from the good earth.

Early settlers say they could jump across when they first came.



This farm is on its way down the river.

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Conditions like this lead to a great national bugaboo - unemployment - discontent.

Scenes like this speak for themselves.

A proven fact - the line of unemployed grows as the land diminishes.

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Chapter V

NATIONAL PROGRESS CAN BE MEASURED IN STABLE COMMUNITIES.

Conditions set forth in this booklet suggest two courses:

1. The course of INACTION - Do nothing now.

Sixty years ago 20,000 cattle and 60,000 sheep used the Escalante ranges - a rate of use greatly in excess of grazing capacity. The livestock enterprises at that time meant a gross annual income based on current prices of about $1,800,000.

In 1943, largely because of decreased forage productivity, only about one-fourth as many livestock were grazed. The gross income was about $450,000.

Range productivity is continuing to decline. Further reduction of community income is inevitable unless deterioration is stopped.

2. The course of ACTION - Do what is needed now.

Deterioration can be checked and economic stability can be assured by application of a two-point range management program:

FIRST - Balance grazing use with range grazing capacity. This is being done.

SECOND - Apply intensive treatment to stop erosion and improve the forage. Specifically (see map on page 13), the needed measures and their costs are:

Artificial revegetation on 4,000 acres	$ 13,000
Contour trenches, check dams, debris basins	384,000
Fifty miles of stock control fences	33,000
Twenty stock water developments	5,000
Total estimated installation cost	$435,000

This investment now is sound business because:

It will prevent eventual bankruptcy of a useful community.
It will preclude the heavy cost of resettling a frustrated people.
It will protect investments already made in the wildland resource.
It will increase local employment and income.
It will provide a livable environment wherein the people of Escalante can contribute their full share to national wealth and economy.

* * * * *

We must save the land and the industry after they have been won on the field of battle.

"The nation can expect little from citizens leading a bare existence upon ruined land. They cannot create the kind of life essential to human health and intelligence."

-Louis Bromfield - "The Mason Place." The February Rotarian - 1944.